

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-14 ISO-00 NEAE-00 CIAE-00
DODE-00 PM-05 H-02 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 PA-02
SP-02 SS-15 NSCE-00 SSO-00 USIE-00 INRE-00 SSM-05
ACDA-12 HA-05 /098 W
-----103442 031328Z /42

O 031226Z MAR 78
FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1633
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY CAIRO IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
USMISSION USUN NY
USMISSION SINAI

UNCLAS SECTION 1 OF 2 TEL AVIV 2901

E. O. 11652: NA
TAGS: IS EG PEPR
SUBJ: PRESS REPORTS ON SADAT-BEGIN LETTER

1. SUMMARY: THE FOLLOWING MAIN THEMES RUN THROUGH PRESS
REPORTAGE OF THE SADAT/BEGIN LETTER: THE LETTER IS TO BE
WELCOMED (AS IT IS IN JERUSALEM) AS AN ATTEMPT TO CREATE
NEW MOMENTUM BY RE-ESTABLISHING PERSONAL CONTACT BETWEEN
BEGIN AND SADAT. THE LETTER CARRIES A POSITIVE TONE, BUT
DOES NOT CONTAIN AN INVITATION TO BEGIN NOR AN INDICATION
OF A CHANGE IN THE EGYPTIAN POSITION ON SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES.
IT CLARIFIES THE EGYPTIAN POSITION AND EXPLAINS SOME OF
SADAT'S PUBLIC REMARKS, ACCENTUATING THE COMMITMENT TO
THE PEACE PROCESS RATHER THAN ISRAELI-EGYPTIAN DIFFERENCES.
THE LETTER'S SIGNIFICANCE, THEN, LIES IN ITS MERE
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EXISTENCE RATHER THAN ITS CONTENT. END SUMMARY

2. THE FOLLOWING ARE EXTRACTS FROM TODAY'S PRESS
REGARDING SADAT'S LETTER TO BEGIN. IN MAARIV'S
HEADLINE STORY HARIF WRITES THE FOLLOWING. BEGIN QUOTE
EGYPT'S PRESIDENT ANWAR SADAT, IN HIS LETTER TO PRIME
MINISTER BEGIN, DOES NOT FOR THE MOMENT SUGGEST A MEETING

BETWEEN THE TWO TO DO AWAY WITH THE MISUNDERSTANDINGS, AND RESTORE MUTUAL TRUST BETWEEN THEM. BUT THE EGYPTIAN MOVE MIGHT PREPARE THE GROUND FOR A RESUMPTION OF THE PERSONAL CONTACTS BETWEEN THE TWO LEADERS AND MAKING PROGRESS TOWARDS AN AGREEMENT. THE FACT THAT SADAT IN HIS LETTER DOES NOT REPEAT EGYPT'S DEMAND FOR THE EVACUATION OF THE ISRAELI SETTLEMENTS IN EASTERN SINAI, IS READ AS A CONSCIOUS ATTEMPT NOT TO TACKLE THE ISSUES UNDER DISPUTE AT THIS STAGE, BUT TO STRESS THE DESIRE TO CONTINUE THE POLITICAL MOMENTUM. IT IS IN THIS SPIRIT THAT THE PRIME MINISTER WILL ANSWER PRESIDENT SADAT, AND HIS LETTER WILL BE CONVEYED BY THE ROVING US AMBASSADOR, MR ALFRED ATHERTON, ON TUESDAY OF NEXT WEEK. SADAT'S LETTER IS A LENGTHY ONE, BUT ACCORDING TO RELIABLE CIRCLES IT DOES NOT CONTAIN ANYTHING OF SUBSTANCE, AND IS REplete WITH CLICHES. AT THE SAME TIME IT DOES HAVE A 'GOOD ATMOSPHERE' ABOUT IT, WHICH COULD PERHAPS TESTIFY TO PRESIDENT SADAT'S EMOTIONAL READINESS TO REHABILITATE HIS RELATIONS WITH THE PRIME MINISTER--RELATIONS WHICH HAVE BEEN UNDERMINED SINCE SADAT CALLED THE POLITICAL TALKS IN JERUSALEM TO A HALT. THE SENDING OF THIS LETTER BY SADAT WAS PRECEDED BY BEHIND-THE-SCENES POLITICAL INITIATIVES ON THE PART OF PRIME MINISTER BEGIN. APPARENTLY A THIRD, NON-AMERICAN, FACTOR ALSO CONTRIBUTED TO AN IMPROVEMENT OF RELATIONS IN THIS DIRECTION. SINCE SADAT HAD BEEN THE ONE TO HALT THE

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TALKS, IT WAS OBVIOUSLY HE WHO OUGHT TO MAKE THE FIRST MOVE BY SENDING A LETTER TO BEGIN AS A CONCILIATORY GESTURE AND THE CLEAR DECISION OF THE CABINET LAST SUNDAY, TO FREEZE ANY SETTLEMENT IN SINAI FROM NOW ON, WAS INTENDED TO FACILITATE THE EGYPTIAN PRESIDENT'S STAND ON THE ISRAELI SETTLEMENTS. END QUOTE

3. BENZIMAN'S HEADLINE STORY IN HAARETZ READS AS FOLLOWS. BEGIN QUOTE PRESIDENT SADAT HAS SENT A NOTE TO PRIME MINISTER MENAHEM BEGIN EXPRESSING THE DESIRE TO CARRY ON THE NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES IN ORDER TO ESTABLISH PEACE. WRITTEN IN ENGLISH, THE NOTE WAS CONVEYED TO MR BEGIN BY ROVING AMBASSADOR ALFRED ATHERTON YESTERDAY BACK FROM CAIRO. THE NOTE DOES NOT INCLUDE A CONCRETE OFFER FOR A NEW FRAMEWORK FOR THE TALKS BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES, NOR DOES IT INCLUDE AN INVITATION. AT THE SAME TIME IT INCLUDES A SURVEY OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN EGYPT AND ISRAEL HITERTO. SADAT POINTS OUT A NUMBER

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OF OCCURENCES WHICH HE BELIEVS TO HAVE CAUSED
DIFFICULTIES IN THE NEGOTIATIONS AND DETERIORATION
IN RELATIONS WITH MR BEGIN. HE ALSO EXPLAINS A NUMBER OF
HIS REMARKS. AT THE SAME TIME, THE MAIN TREND OF THE
NOTE IS TO EMPHASIZE THE EGYPTIAN PRESIDENT'S COMMITMENT
TO THE PEACE PROCESS...GOVERNMENT SOURCES ESTIMATED
YESTERDAY THAT THE IMPORTANCE OF SADAT'S NOTE IS IN THE
REVIVAL OF THE PERSONAL CONTRACT WITH BEGIN. ONE SOURCE
HAS EXPRESSED THE HOPE THAT IF THAT CONTACT DEVELOPS,
SADAT AND BEGIN MAY RESUME MEETINGS. END QUOTE

4. RUBENSTEIN OF DAVAR WRITES THAT T"THE LETTER CONTAINS
NO FAR-REACHING CHANGES REGARDING THE EGYPTIAN POSITION
IN THE TALKS...OBSERVERS IN JERUSALEM SAID LAST NIGHT
THAT THE CONTENTS OF THE LETTER ARE GENERAL AND REPEAT
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THE KNOWN EGYPTIAN POSITIONS. IT DOES NOT CLEAR THE
UNCERTAINTY CREATED IN THE FACE OF A POSSIBILITY OF

DEADLOCK...THE VALUE OF SADAT'S LETTER LIES IN ITS TRANSMISSION AND CONSTITUTE THE FIRST CONTACT BETWEEN BEGIN AND SADAT SINCE THE SUMMIT IN ISMAILYA. AN AUTHORIZED SOURCE CONFIRMED LAST NIGHT THAT IT IS NOT THERE IS YET TIME TO TALK ABOUT A POSSIBLE DIRECT MEETING BETWEEN SADAT AND BEGIN."

5. ZIMUKI HAS A HEADLINE STORY IN YEDIOT IN WHICH HE REVEALS THAT "SADAT'S LETTER CONTAINS CLARIFICATIONS REGARDING EXPRESSIONS MADE BY THE EGYPTIAN PRESIDENT ON VARIOUS OCCASIONS. THIS IS THE FIRST TIME THAT SADAT HAS DECIDED TO CLARIFY HIS POSITION IN WRITING AND THAT IS PROPER IN ORDER TO PREVENT FURTHER MISUNDERSTANDINGS SUCH AS THOSE THAT FOLLOWED HIS PRIVATE TALKS WITH BEGIN, SADAT'S LETTER IS WRITTEN IN A DIGNIFIED AND TO THE POINT MANNER. AMONG OTHER THINGS IT RELATES TO EGYPTIAN INTERPRETATION OF 242 AND CLARIFIES THAT NO CHANGE HAS TAKEN PLACE IN THE ROUGH EGYPTIAN POSITION ON THE QUESTION OF DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES, WITHOUT WHICH CAIRO IS NOT PREPARED TO RESUME THE DISCUSSIONS AND IN THE COMMITTEES." ZIMUKI STATES THAT SADAT'S LETTER CONTAINS 3 PAGES.

6. DAHLIA SHEHORI IN AL HAMISHMAR WRITES: "THE PERSONAL LETTER SENT BY THE EGYPTIAN PRESIDENT WAS VIEWED IN JERUSALEM IN A MOST POSITIVE LIGHT. ACCORDING TO POLITICAL SOURCES, THE LETTER HAS BROUGHT ABOUT THE RESUMPTION OF PERSONAL CONTACT BETWEEN THE TWO LEADERS AND AN IMPROVEMENT IN THE NEGOTIATION ATMOSPHERE--ALTHOUGH IT DID NOT ALTER THE CONTROVERSIAL SUBJECT. THE LETTER IS THE FIRST DIRECT CONTACT BETWEEN SADAT AND BEGIN
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SINCE THEIR MEETING AT THE END OF DECEMBER IN ISMAILYA... IT BECAME KNOWN THAT THE LETTER CONTAINS SEVERAL PAGES BUT ITS SIGNIFICANCE LIES IN ITS MERE EXISTENCE, NOT NECESSARILY IN ITS CONTENTS. IT IS ALSO KNOWN THAT A POSSIBILITY OF A MEETING BETWEEN SADAT AND BEGIN IS NOT MENTIONED IN THE LETTER." SHEHORI QUOTES POLITICAL SOURCES IN JERUSALEM AS SAYING "THAT THEY ATTACH SIGNIFICANCE ALSO TO THE TIMING OF THE LETTER--ON THE EVE OF BEGIN'S TRIP TO THE US. IN THEIR VIEW, THE TIMING INDICATES THAT SADAT ADHERES TO HIS ORIGINAL INITIATIVE AND PREFERS NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN THE SIDES TO AN ACTIVE MEDIATION BY A THIRD PARTY."

7. THE POST'S LANDAU WRITES, IN THE LEAD STORY: BEGIN QUOTE THE CONTINUATION OF ISRAEL-EGYPT NEGOTIATIONS UNTIL THE WASHINGTON SUMMIT, DESPITE THEIR HAVING REACHED SUBSTANTIAL DEADLOCK, WAS ENSURED YESTERDAY BY PRESIDENT

ANWAR SADAT'S SENDING A PERSONAL LETTER TO PREMIER
MENAHEM BEGIN. ISRAELI OFFICIALS WERE MUCH HEARTENED
BY THIS STEP. THEY SAID IT SHOWED CLEARLY THAT EGYPT
WANTED THE TALKS TO GO ON. THE PREMIER DID NOT RELEASE
THE CONTENT OF THE LENGTHY EPISTLE. BUT IT WAS APPARENT
THAT NEITHER IN THE LETTER, NOR IN THEIR COMMENTS ON
ISRAEL'S LATEST PROPOSALS--BOTH CONVEYED YESTERDAY BY
US ROVING ENVOY ALFRED ATHERTON--HAD THE EGYPTIANS
SHIFTED SIGNIFICANTLY TOWARDS THE ISRAELI FORMULATIONS
ON THE "DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES." END QUOTE
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